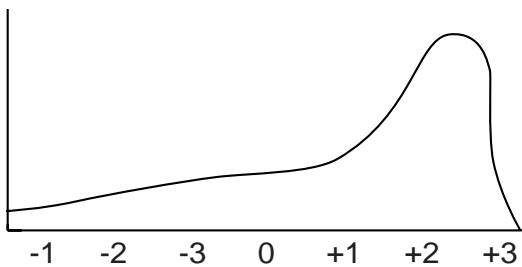


I read with interest the September-October 2000 issue of *Program Manager*. Enjoyed a number of fine articles; however, would like to comment on one entitled *Leveraging Diversity*, by David Breslin.

If I was a statistician — and I am — I would take serious issue with the conclusions. First, the use of the bell shaped curve assumes normal distribution — very hard to come by in the world of personnel ratings, whether military or civilian. Data from the Services and the Office of Personnel Management will show a very skewed distribution, with a curve for ratings of personnel that looks like the curve shown here.



This makes it difficult because the rater wanting to get his or her personnel promoted will push the ratings into the outstanding column. The same holds true of industry. Thus, you have a statistical problem in ensuring you have the “best and the brightest” and not a bunch of “nice to haves, but not really the ones you would like to look at.” To correct the curve, your database would be astronomical and not very useful.

The rules in personnel selection are quite extensive, whether codified in law, federal regulations, state regulations, union-negotiated, or Human Resources Office-directed. They are designed to ensure equal opportunity for eligible employees (and this does not necessarily mean the best and the brightest). The program manager does not have a whole lot of flexibility, particularly at the higher grades, and particularly with the extensive grievance procedures available to those who be-

lieve they have not been properly considered. In addition, he or she is bound by very specific laws and regulations regarding the acquisition workforce.

Thus, to use your perfect bell curve, you will have to correct the rating system in industry and the Military Services — a rather formidable task. When you complete that, you will have the task of reviewing and canceling many laws, regulations, and rules governing personnel selection, U.S.-wide (not a bad idea as they need a comprehensive overhaul).

Next, the baseball case. I have a problem with mixing apples and oranges. The baseball problem resulted from racial discrimination, i.e., the exclusion of a whole race. After this problem was reasonably solved, the managers were very specific and limiting in filling holes in their lineup, i.e., pitchers, fielders, pinch hitters, and they only looked for people to fill those specific billets.

The personnel system, while not perfect, is a pretty fair system, even with a statistically skewed distribution. The article is aimed at broadening the area of consideration in something which is not a sport played for entertainment, but a very serious expenditure of taxpayer funds on programs affecting national security — hardly a fair statistical comparison. The Congress has taken a dim view of unqualified people in the acquisition field. Therefore, we are not looking for the best or brightest; we are specifically looking for a person to fill a very specific job description, i.e., logistician, flight test manager, financial manager, or configuration manager.

This leads to the third point. Take a hypothetical case in Service X. In the wisdom of the four-star boss, what was a medium-sized classified research and development project has been elevated to a project because of a technical breakthrough. Colonel “I can Doit,” a recent graduate of the PM course at DSMC, has been assigned. He has a

technical staff, but initially must depend on the functional organization for support until he can organize a completely integrated project. Meanwhile, the tasking from his four-star boss states that he must have an independent budget estimate ready for congressional hearings in six months. So the colonel sets, as his first priority, getting a real pro as a financial manager at the GS-15 level, with a possible upgrade to SES.

The forecast indicates that the program will be a Joint Service one, with an overseas partner, thus requiring a background in Service X, other Services, and overseas partner financial systems. Training was out of the question given the short time span. The colonel was very specific about the job requirements in advertising for this job: a B.A./M.B.A. in financial management; at least five years' experience in DoD financial programs, preferably in any Armed Services comptroller office; two years' supervisory experience; and a top secret security clearance. He also got a waiver to limit the advertising period to two weeks.

In the meantime, he went back to his boss and pled for the temporary assignment of a financial expert from within his command until he could select a permanent person. The colonel could have selected from the first three on the register, but wanted a broader base and selection of a person who could "hit the road running."

Now please do not tell me that excluding possible applicants because of specific job requirements is discrimination or limits the field. This is sound management. This is why people take certain jobs and training to get experience for future opportunities. They work hard to be the best qualified. Being the brightest is not necessarily a desirable attribute.

This was an actual case. The advertising resulted in 50 applications, reduced in screening to verify qualifications and clearance to 25. First-round interviews resulted in reduction of applicants to 10, with the top five presented to the colonel for his selection. The process took four months.

The statement in the article that "the overall quality of the workforce is lowered anytime a group is arbitrarily excluded from consideration" is flat out wrong. I agree that unreasonable restrictions are wrong, but this is what the Human Resources folks are supposed to check. I do not worry about the superstars — most of them need a little seasoning, and a short wait will not hurt them or the system. "Too far, too fast" has hurt a lot of good people.

Thus, the point of the article is unproved. More detailed research into actual cases in government and industry may prove that widening the competitive field for the sake of so-called "diversity," may lower rather than raise the quality of the workforce. This philosophy appears to have lowered the quality in schools and colleges, and in some businesses.

If we do the personnel selection properly, within current laws, regulations, and procedures, we will maintain a high-quality workforce.

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